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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 007874

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [ECON](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: KING ABDULLAH OPENS PARLIAMENT WITH SPEECH
EMPHASIZING REFORM; NEW SPEAKER CHOSEN BY ACCLAMATION

REF: A. AMMAN 07805

[1](#)B. AMMAN 06812

[1](#)C. AMMAN 06491

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires David Hale for Reasons 1.5 (B,D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (U) King Abdullah inaugurated December 1 the regular session of the 14th Jordanian Parliament with a speech detailing his vision for the country. The King called for both political and economic development, including an emphasis on democracy and transparency, closely echoing his October 23 public letter outlining the goals for his new government. Following the speech, former government minister Abdul Hadi Majali was elected speaker of the Lower House without opposition. End Summary.

ROYAL PRONOUNCEMENT

[1](#)2. (U) King Abdullah opened the 14th Jordanian Parliament's "ordinary session" on December 1 amidst much fanfare. The Parliament had previously held an "extraordinary session" from July 16 to September 28 (see ref c). After a thunderous 21-gun salute and shouts of "Long live the King!" from East Bank tribesmen, the King delivered the traditional Speech from the Throne before the joint houses of Parliament, members of the royal family, government officials, foreign dignitaries and the press.

[1](#)3. (U) At the outset of his 25 minute speech, the King called for Jordan to become "a model of a democratic Arab Islamic State, based on justice, under the sovereignty of the law, political pluralism and respect of citizens' rights." He acknowledged the "vital and active legislative role" of Parliament and his desire that it be a "legislative chamber that distinguishes itself in its performance, and a source to which our Government refers for assistance when it works out its comprehensive plans and national programs." The King challenged MPs to take a leading role in "combating corruption, favoritism, and 'wasta'" and to put "the national interest before all the personal interests of his/her electoral precinct or those of his/her relatives and acquaintances."

[1](#)4. (U) The King said his overall goal for Jordan was "comprehensive development" based on the following five "foundations:" 1) a society built upon justice, equality, transparency, respect for human rights, and the rule of law; 2) the guarantee of women's rights to ensure their participation in all aspects of society, as well increased attention to the country's youth; 3) a "culture of democracy" with respect for the views of others and acceptance of differences of opinions; 4) an independent and neutral judiciary, along with a modern media sector operating in an environment of "pluralism and responsible freedom;" and 5) a "bold mentality that adopts radical changes in the modes of thinking and the mechanics of decision-making."

DEVELOPING THE ECONOMY & CULTIVATING DEMOCRACY

[1](#)5. (U) The King stated that his government would "work relentlessly to raise the economic growth rate, provide work opportunities for youth, and alleviate the problems of poverty and unemployment." To achieve these goals, the King proposed improved educational programs and stronger coordination between the needs of the labor market and the educational/vocational training systems. Recognizing the leading role of the private sector in economic development, the King called for "an investment environment capable of attracting capital" which would aid in the transition from a "traditional economy to a modern one based on science, knowledge and productivity."

[1](#)6. (U) The King declared that it was the duty of all sectors of society, including civil society organizations, to create "a radical, positive transformation in our democratization process." He further noted that political parties with

"comprehensive, integrated national programs" were "vital and necessary" for the country, and that these parties should be established by "the grassroots," as opposed to "individuals or groups that are brought together by transient interests." The King acknowledged the legitimacy of opposition groups, stating that, "We look forward to the day when nationalist opposition parties that are loyal to Jordan will be partners in making our national decisions."

PRAISE FOR SECURITY FORCES, SILENCE ON FOREIGN POLICY

17. (SBU) King Abdullah went out of his way to extol Jordan's military and security forces, expressing "pride and appreciation for their omnipresent role in defending the Homeland," and stating that "our interest and care for them shall continue to top our national priorities." The King warned against "falsely charging these forces or belittling their sacrifices" and pledged to modernize their capabilities and improve their living conditions. These comments, an apparent retort to criticism heard in Parliament last month of the security services, prompted prolonged, pronounced applause from security service dignitaries in the audience.

18. (C) In contrast to his trumpeting of domestic reforms, the King paid scant attention to foreign policy matters. He devoted only a few sentences to the subject at the end of his address, most notably saying that Jordan would not spare any effort "until justice has been achieved in Palestine and Iraq and until the peoples of these two brotherly peoples enjoy their independent free will."

AN ENDORSEMENT FROM THE PRESS

19. (C) Reactions to the King's speech in the local press have been uniformly positive (consistent with decades' old practice) with editorial writers commending King Abdullah for trying to move the country in the right direction. Mixed in with this praise, however, is a note of skepticism on whether the King's vision will be implemented. As expressed in the Arabic daily Al Arab Al Yawm, the speech needs "a serious translation into reality," while another journalist wrote "what remains is to translate the big titles into actual policy and law."

SPEAKER CHOSEN BY ACCLAMATION

10. (U) Following the King's speech, the Lower House of Parliament chose Abdul Hadi Majali (East Banker, Kerak - 2nd District), the head of the conservative National Action Front bloc, by acclamation as its Speaker. Majali, a previous Lower House Speaker and former chief of the Public Security Directorate and Minister of Public Works, ran uncontested after his opponents dropped out of the Speaker's race one by one during the last two weeks. Key to Majali's success was a pledge of support from the Islamic Action Front (IAF), which had previously backed incumbent Speaker Saad Hayel Srour. Majali will serve a one-year term after which the Lower House will elect a new Speaker.

11. (C) The choice of Majali, a traditionalist from a family which has long served the security establishment, comes as no great surprise from a Parliament structured to give primacy to East Bank conservatives. However, his selection by the House casts into sharp relief the gap between the liberal rhetoric of the King and the conservative instincts of the House.

COMMENT

12. (C) The King's speech strongly parallels the contents of his public letter of October 23 designating Faisal al-Fayez as Prime Minister (see ref c). He has not backed away from his previous call for deep-rooted political and economic reform. The one noteworthy difference in the King's speech is its unqualified support for the security forces. Given reservations within the security apparatus about the wisdom of empowering civil society and greater democracy, this may have been included to assuage their concerns and reassure them of their continued importance in government.

13. (C) Despite the speech's promise to "adopt a comprehensively-planned, clearly-defined path to economic and social reforms," the GOJ has yet to reveal a specific action plan to achieve the King's lofty goals. As PM Fayez told A/S Burns during their November 30 meeting (ref a), the GOJ will first try to reach the broadest possible consensus for change through its ongoing dialogue efforts before developing a plan in the coming months.

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HALE